

Mr./Madam Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity. My name is Gregory Lewis. I'm the head of the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station. The U.S. Sheep Experiment Station is part of the Agricultural Research Service, which is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief scientific research agency. Our job in ARS is to find solutions to agricultural problems that affect Americans every day, from field to table.

The mission of the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station is to develop integrated methods for increasing production efficiency of sheep and to simultaneously improve the sustainability of rangeland ecosystems. Our headquarters is located approximately 6 miles north of Dubois, Idaho, but approximately 35%, or, 16,600 acres, of our land is in Montana.

On December 19, 1922, the land in Montana was withdrawn from the public domain and assigned to the USDA for "experimental sheep grazing." The water resources on our Montana land make it possible for us to carry out our research assignment and to accomplish our mission. The water we use in Montana has been, and will continue to be, used for research to develop and improve breeds of sheep that will more efficiently convert the nutrients they harvest from rangeland into food and fiber; develop grazing practices that conserve rangeland ecosystems, protect water quality, and maintain or enhance water yield; and protect wildlife habitat.

Thus, a federal team has been working very closely, and I believe very productively, with the Montana Reserved Water Rights Compact Commission to reserve water rights in the State of Montana for use by the USDA, ARS, U.S. Sheep Experiment Station. The federal team includes Department of Justice attorney, Mr. James DuBois; USDA, Office of General Counsel attorney, Ms. Jody Miller; Dr. Dwayne Buxton, Director of the Pacific West Area of ARS; and Mr. Quinn Jacobson and myself at the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station.

The USDA, Agricultural Research Service considers the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station land in Montana a truly unique resource. The bill developed from the Water Rights Compact between the State of Montana and the United States of America, Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service will reserve water and help the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station do its part to find solutions to agricultural problems that affect Americans every day.

Thank you for this opportunity to describe the importance of this bill to the USDA, the Agricultural Research Service, and the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station. We support HB _____ and encourage you to pass it.

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